

Director's Remarks, April 2010

Performance

The Public Library Downtown almost (19,902) matched circulation downtown in March 2009 (19,948). When combined with increases in online renewals, downloads, and continuing branch success, we are extending performance gains built in every month but January this year. However, the March gate count downtown (21650 – 2010; 22,112 – 2009; 23,920 – 2008) shows the problem is with use of the building, not circulation per user, which is rising. The reasons for not coming most often cited by patrons are parking and fear of crime. In looking for ways to market changes to the building, it may be worth our while to use billboards and buses and other mass advertising to highlight family use and convenience to downtown visitors, workers, and pedestrians.

Facilities Master Plan & New Strategic Plan (board approval requested)

Can we now join forces with the Regional Planning Agency and local governments to build a master plan for development? The City and County will spend the next fiscal year deciding our fate (renegotiating the sales tax agreement expiring in May 2011) based on where they think we ought to be headed. It seems in our best interest to work with them on a sustainable future, one based on available sources for funding. Without such a plan, we risk alienating communities like Soddy-Daisy that need a branch library, but also isolation from politically popular but poorly planned alternatives (e.g. Signal Mountain & East Ridge). The Brainerd community is building momentum for a new branch, but has a very nebulous sense of optimal placement and size. Several representing Soddy-Daisy have expressed frustration with our failure to offer a concrete plan for their area. Recent designs for a new downtown library by a group of Auburn graduate students raise questions about what we are doing to fix our problems downtown.

The Library Taskforce established a two-year strategic plan that will expire at the end of June 2011. We will need to begin planning the budget for the following year (FY2012) in about eight months. We have new data from national and local surveys of library patrons. Can we begin setting up a strategic planning effort with Karen McMahon and the Library Taskforce or on our own?

Library Budget

We expect to finish the year without touching Reserve funds and may do so without spending any of the Free Public Library money. Following our timeline, the replacement of carpet on the second floor, display furniture on the first, lockers on the third, and RFID equipment may not exceed our available funds. The bulk of the work with automation and building changes can be coordinated with capital and foundation requests (results due in August and September). The County will probably wait to complete their budget until after commission elections in August.

If we are to obtain support from local governments and foundations this year, we need your help contacting government officials and working with our grant committee. Please allow time at this meeting for a frank discussion of alternatives.

Reorganization Downtown

The Library staff expects to consolidate departments by the end of June. It may be wise to hold off on increasing branch hours until we know our budget. We hope to complete moving the nonfiction collection from the first floor into renovated space on the second floor prior to our annual fundraiser on October 16. If the carpeting of the second floor stack space is not complete by August, the first floor books will be moved there anyway, and the work will be finished piecemeal.

Auburn Presentations

The graduate design students from Auburn who won the VW bridge design contest worked on five Platinum-level LEED designs for a new downtown library and presented their penultimate results to a small group of local architects, city officials, and library representatives last Friday. Their sites included: space at the corner of MLK & Riverside Drive; along Frazier adjacent to Renaissance Park; immediately west of the Aquarium (two proposals); immediately east of Bessie Smith Hall on MLK.

Though all the designs relied on energy efficiency unique to their structures, they also researched and recommended simpler solutions such as HVAC controls, solar lighting & energy systems, LED lighting, and motion-controlled lighting. We will be using some of these technologies in our reorganization.

All incorporated industrial bin systems that have been marketed to academic libraries in place of compact shelving (the automated systems are about one-fifth the cost). Large urban central libraries across the country are also distinguishing between the popular material they display and large behind-the-scenes stack areas. The bins could work in conjunction with RFID sorting systems to insure that the most popular materials are in front and the items most in need of weeding are removed.